



MONTHLY JANUARY 2006 UPDATE

◆ Governor Ehrlich Announces \$90 Million in Disability Initiatives

Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., has announced his FY 2007 disability budget initiatives of nearly \$90 million across state agencies, **designed to lower unemployment levels for people with disabilities and support more people in their communities.**

Included in the new proposal are **\$10.6 million to fully fund Maryland's Medicaid Buy-In** for more than 1,500 Marylanders and **more than \$17 million in new funding to increase the availability of services** to people with disabilities.

"This budget will fully implement a Medicaid Buy-In for Maryland workers with disabilities and enable people to return to work without losing their health coverage under Medicaid," said Governor Ehrlich.

Additional employment-related initiatives include:

- ◆ new intensive efforts to retrain people who have head injuries to re-enter the workforce;
- ◆ an increase in funding for attendant care to support people going to work or higher education;
- ◆ job training for blind services;
- ◆ job training for youth transitioning from school to employment, and;
- ◆ new efforts focused on supporting youth with learning disabilities who enroll in community college.

The Governor's FY 2007 disability budget includes significant investments in workforces who care for people with disabilities including: wages paid to direct support workers in community programs, private duty nurses under Medicaid, home health care workers, and mental health providers, in addition to other programs and services.

"Under the leadership of the Maryland Department of Disabilities, we will renew Maryland's commitment to people with disabilities by opening up waiting lists and program registries for services that have long been frozen," said Governor Ehrlich.

For more information about the Governor's FY 2007 Budget initiatives, visit www.gov.state.md.us.



◆ Empowering People ◆

MTA Paratransit System Makes Dramatic Improvements in Customer Service, Settles Lawsuit

The Maryland Transit Administration's (MTA) Mobility Paratransit division, which provides curb-to-curb transportation services for people with disabilities, has achieved an on-time performance rate of 90 percent and experienced a reduction in customer complaints by 50 percent. The improvements are the direct result of a series of dramatic changes instituted by the MTA beginning last year.

As a result of these improvements, MTA administrators and attorneys representing people with disabilities announced the settlement of a federal class action lawsuit brought against the MTA in October 2003.

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Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor ~ Michael S. Steele, Lt. Governor ~ Kristen Cox, Secretary ~ Diane McComb, Deputy Secretary

◆ MDOD Secures \$2.6 Million In Funding for Assistive Technology

A unique public-private partnership has resulted in \$2.6 million in new grants to fund the Assistive Technology Guaranteed Loan Program (ATGLP) for the next 17 years. The Loan Program, established in 1999, has assisted nearly 500 individuals with disabilities with diverse goals – from leaving institutions to live independently in the community to starting their own businesses.

“This program has helped people in such a meaningful way but was in jeopardy for lack of continued funding. **We are extremely grateful that so many parties came together to make this happen,**” said **Kristen Cox, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Disabilities.**

The program provides low-interest loans to help Marylanders with disabilities and their families buy disability-related devices like vans with wheelchair lifts, computers, wheelchair ramps, and hearing and vision aids. Some of the grant funding will be used to create a new component specifically to help people with disabilities buy equipment to start home-based businesses or to telecommute.

The \$2.6 million grant is a combination of funds from the U.S. Department of Education, which contributed \$2.1 million, four private foundations, two private business and two state agencies.

Private foundations contributing to the effort include: the **Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation**, the **J. Willard and Alice S. Marriot Foundation**, the **Herbert Bearman Foundation** and the **Elizabeth Streb Peroutka Foundation**. The **Ride-Away Corp.**, which sells modified vehicles to people with disabilities, and the **State Employees Credit Union**, which participates in the program as a lender, also contributed to the matching grant. The **Maryland Department of Disabilities** and **Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services** added the remaining funds.

For more information about the ATGLP or other services available through MDOD’s Maryland Technology Assistance Program call 410-554-9230 (voice), 1-800-832-4827 (voice) or 1-866-881-7488 (tty toll-free) or visit www.mdap.org.

◆ Paratransit Lawsuit Settled

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“When we came into office in 2003, we found a paratransit system that was chronically late and unable to provide an acceptable level of service to those who need it most,” said **Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.** “The improved on-time performance and drop in customer complaints are the result of our comprehensive overhaul of the system. New ideas, new equipment and new management have created an MTA mobility program that now delivers the service our customers expect and deserve.”

Beginning in July 2004, the MTA began implementing significant improvements to its Mobility Paratransit service, including:

- The purchase of 98 new Mobility vehicles with onboard global positioning system technology, allowing the MTA to track vehicles’ locations at all times.
- All Paratransit trips are now scheduled by the MTA and only MTA-certified passengers may use the service. In the past, outside contractors handled scheduling and blended other passenger trips with MTA passenger trips causing inefficient scheduling and performance.
- The MTA initiated a Taxi Access program where paratransit customers pay a premium \$3 fare, subsidized by the MTA, to use one of 18 taxi companies for their transportation needs. Passengers can schedule a Taxi Access ride up to 40 minutes before they want to travel unlike regular paratransit service where customers must schedule 24 hours in advance.
- The MTA distributed NEXTEL phones to some of its common destinations so that these locations can stay in direct contact with Mobility dispatch.

MTA has seen the number of customer complaints decrease from an average of nearly 7 complaints per thousand trips in 2004 to 3.5 complaints per thousand trips today. Today’s 90 percent on time performance rate is up from 77 percent prior to these changes. The improved performance comes at a time when demand for the mobility program has increased. From July to September 2004, MTA provided 126,000 mobility trips. During the same period in 2005, MTA provided 153,000 mobility trips

For more information visit www.mtmaryland.com or call (410) 539-5000 or (410) 539-3497 (TTY).

Monthly Update looking for feedback

This issue marks the one-year anniversary of MDOD’s **Monthly Update**. MDOD staff wants to know whether the newsletter has been helpful and is providing useful information.

Are there other issues you’d like to hear about? Could the newsletter be more helpful by concentrating on other areas?

If you have any suggestions, please email your ideas to mdod@mdod.state.md.us. Be sure to indicate that it is a suggestion for the Monthly Update. You can also call us at 410-767-3660 (voice/tty) or 1-800-637-4133 (voice/tty) or write us at Maryland Department of Disabilities, 217 E. Redwood Street, Suite 1300, Baltimore, MD 21202.